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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 001053

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: JORDANIANS TAKE PART IN SIZABLE BUT SOGGY ANTI-WAR MARCH

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM. REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D)

1. (SBU) On Saturday, February 15, thousands of demonstrators participated in a 2 kilometer anti-war march through the Shmeisani district of Amman ending at the UN Headquarters there. The demonstration, organized by the Higher Coordination Committee for Opposition Parties, was approved by the government and proceeded amidst a large and visible police presence. Press estimates of crowd size ranged from 5,000 to 15,000 (with embassy security contacts reporting the actual size at between 3,000 to 5,000). The crowd would presumably have been larger but for the cold and heavy rains which fell during the march. There were no arrests and the demonstration ended peacefully.

2. (SBU) The demonstrators chanted anti-war and anti-U.S. statements and carried banners such as "No blood for oil", "No to attacking Iraq" and "USA, where is your democracy". Many participants hoisted pictures of King Abdullah and Saddam Hussein along with Jordanian, Palestinian, Iraqi and Muslim Brotherhood flags. Islamic Action Front Secretary General Hamzeh Mansour addressed the crowd, indulging in explicitly anti-American rhetoric stating that Arab and world public opinion against a military strike was reaching the boiling point.

3. (C) COMMENT. The march and rally were fully arranged in advance between the GOJ and the rally sponsors. The rhetoric was sometimes heated and called on Arab leaders to refrain from assisting US or British forces in any military offensive. The tone of the rally and of local press reports and editorials boasted of a perceived tide of opposition to the war around the globe.

4. (C) Nevertheless, there is a seeming disconnect between the almost-universal opposition among Jordanians to war in Iraq and the modest size of the demonstration here. Jordanian contacts lament the fact that demonstrations in European countries were larger, and that many were led by government officials reflecting the opposition of their people. Some contacts attribute the low turnout to wariness among Jordanians about getting involved in an anti-war movement clearly not popular with the government; others to weariness from years of unnerving news from the West Bank and Iraq and to a pervasive sense that Jordanians have no power to influence the march to war.
GNEHM